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Viewing cable 09ATHENS175, CHOD GRAPSAS ON TURKEY AND AEGEAN, AFGHANISTAN

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ATHENS175	2009-02-06 15:46	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Athens

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SUBJECT: CHOD GRAPSAS ON TURKEY AND AEGEAN, AFGHANISTAN
DEPLOYMENTS, AND PROCUREMENTS
Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a February 4 lunch at the Ambassador's residence, the Chief of the Hellenic National Defense General Staff, General of the Army Demitrios Grapsas, termed recent Turkish behavior in the Aegean "childish" and made clear that the perception of the Turkish threat drives Greek military procurement and organization. The Ambassador emphasized the need for calm and restraint in response to perceived provocations; Grapsas said he sought to keep tensions low, but questioned recent Turkish actions in the Aegean. On Afghanistan, he said the GOG was actively reviewing potential additional contributions and he hoped for a decision soon. Grapsas was accompanied by Brigadier General Alexandros Tsigaras, Director of the Defense Planning Directorate of the General Staff, and Executive Assistant Colonel Thomaidis. The Ambassador was accompanied by DATT, ODC Chief, A/Political Counselor, and Press Attache. End Summary.

Turkey - "No Trust and No Real Dialogue"

12. (C) Grapsas said that Greece's defense procurement plans were predicated "threats in its neighborhood from immediate neighbors." Turkey was a "security threat" to Greece. This affects what Greece buys, how Greece organizes and deploys its forces, and whether Greece can make additional forces available for peacekeeping missions. Ambassador Speckhard said that the United States did not share Greece's assessment of the Turkish threat.

13. (C) Grapsas said that he was committed to "keeping tensions down," with Turkey, but that the Turks made this difficult. He said the Turks were "acting like children" in the Aegean, displaying "patriotic exuberance." Grapsas said he had sought to take the high road, by ignoring some of Turkey's behavior -- such as when Turkish authorities contacted the pilot of a helicopter taking him to the island of Agathonisi in December and informing him that he had violated Turkish airspace. "We just continued on, and I went to the island without making this into an incident," Grapsas remarked, but he also intimated that the incident had rankled him. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of keeping tensions low, and that General Grapsas could best protect the security of his country by acting with restraint in response to perceived provocations. Grapsas responded that he and the Greek general staff were "mature, and we will act responsibly," but he added that "we also have some (unspecified) redlines, Q that there will be (unspecified) consequences for Turkey if they cross them."

14. (C) Grapsas said there was "no trust" between Greece and Turkey, stemming from "deep-rooted perceptions." When asked about mil-to-mil contacts, Grapsas said he had good contacts with former Turkish CHOD Buyukanit. However, he had not been able to establish personal rapport with neQHOD Basbug, whom he characterized as aloof. That said, Grapsas and Tsigaras affirmed that extensive contacts take place between the Greek and Turkish militaries. Grapsas lamented, however, that these contacts did not have much impact, as the big issues dividing the two militaries were "national," and needed to be solved at the political level. He added, "all we can do is try to create conditions for politicians to solve these problems," adding that in Turkey the politicians appeared to be unwilling to confront the Turkish military on this agenda.

Afghanistan: Considering More Contributions

15. (C) The Ambassador noted that Washington was considering how to advance stability in Afghanistan, adding that it would be a good time for Greece to make additional contributions as a symbol of the renewed strength in our relationship. Grapsas responded that he and his staff had been "looking at

possibilities," and had met with Defense Minister Meimarakis the previous day on this subject. He said that he hoped Greece would "soon decide" on additional contributions (although he gave no hints as to what these additional contributions might be), and he emphasized that he understood

the need for a stronger international presence in Afghanistan.

Defense Procurement/Transformation

¶16. (S/NF) Grapsas confirmed that it was likely that some significant defense procurements would be announced in the not-too-distant future. These procurements were "the end of a multi-year process." He noted that former Finance Minister Alagoukousis had done a "good job" in exercising fiscal discipline over the process, adding that planning is in place for future multi-year payments for these procurements. He also noted that the opposition was questioning the wisdom of major purchases in the context of the global economic crisis, but he affirmed that the government would proceed with its plans -- highlighting Turkey's proximity to Greece as a factor in the need to conclude these purchases. The Ambassador emphasized that a number of good U.S. companies would be bidding on these contracts. The United States was not lobbying for a specific firm, but expected the process to be fair and transparent, and expected that price and quality should be the criteria. The United States did not believe it was in Greece's interest or the Alliance's interest for political criteria to enter into the mix. U.S. firms would be competitive if the criteria were the best equipment at the best price. Grapsas noted that political criteria were also relevant for policy-makers, later noting, "I did not favor purchase of the (Russian) BMP-'s," stating that they were not well suited for the operations where he would likely need to deploy them.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador also raised the need for greater numbers of trained and equipped light, expeditionary forces, noting that Greek forces were seen by many in NATO as requiring further transformation. Even if Greece's central objective was defense against Turkey, the more likely scenario was the need to rapidly deploy in the Aegean, and not to defend against a frontal ground assault. Grapsas responded that some "middle ground" was needed, but agreed that it was a priority for the Greek military to develop additional expeditionary forces capable of being deployed rapidly.

U.S./Greece Mil-to-Mil Contacts

¶18. (C) Grapsas made it a point to emphasize his satisfaction with the mil-to-mil contacts between the United States and Greece. He termed these relations "good" but called for "even more expanded contacts." He viewed favorably his August 2008 trip to Washington where he met Deputy Secretary of Defense England and Deputy CJCS General Cartwright and SAC-T Mattis. He also promised to look into reviewing current regulations precluding Greek cadets from attending U.S. service academies. He termed his cooperation with the Defense Attache's office "excellent."

¶19. (C) In a private pull-aside, the General told the Ambassador that he personally supported the United States and believed we shared the common values of democracy. He was personally supportive of U.S. military operations and would continue to do what he could to encourage Greece's support.
SPECKHARD